

THE TWO GUARDS, PRAYING AND WATCHING

NO. 2254

A SERMON
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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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*“Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God,
and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”
Nehemiah 4:9*

NEHEMIAH and the Jews with him were rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. Sanballat and others were angry with them, and tried to stop the work. They determined to pounce upon the people on a sudden and slay them, and so put an end to what they were doing. Our text tells us what Nehemiah and his companions did in this emergency, “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”

These people had not only to build the wall of Jerusalem, but to watch against their enemies at the same time. Their case is ours. We have to work for Christ. I hope that all of us who love Him are trying to do what we can to build up His kingdom, but we need also to watch against deadly foes. If they can destroy us, of course they will also destroy our work. They will do both, if they can.

The powers of evil are mad against the people of God. If they can in any way injure or annoy us, you may rest assured that they will do so. They will leave no stone unturned, if it can serve their purpose. No arrows will be left in the quivers of hell while there are godly men and women at whom they can be aimed. Satan and his allies aim at our hearts every poisoned dart they have.

Nehemiah had been warned of the attack that was to be made upon the city. The Jews who lived near these Samaritans had heard their talk of what they meant to do, and they came and told Nehemiah of the plotting of the adversaries. We also have been warned. As our Lord said to Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat,” so has He, in His Word, told us that there is a great and terrible evil power which is seeking our destruction. If Satan can do it, he will not only sift us as wheat, but he will cast us into the fire that we may be destroyed.

Brethren, “we are not ignorant of his devices.” You are not left in a fool’s paradise, to dream of security from trial and to fancy that you are past temptation.

It was well for these people, also, that being in danger, and being aware of the malice of their enemies, they had a noble leader to incite them to the right course to be pursued. Nehemiah was well-qualified for his work. He gave the Jews very shrewd, sensible, and yet spiritual advice and this was a great help to them in their hour of need.

Beloved, we have a better leader than Nehemiah, we have our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and we have His Holy Spirit, who dwells in us, and shall be with us. I beg you to listen to His wise and good advice. I think that He will give it to you through our explanation of the text. He will say to you, what Nehemiah, in effect, said to these people, “Watch and pray.” Although the adversaries of the Jews conspired together, and came to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder the work of rebuilding the wall, Nehemiah says, “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”

In the text, I see *two guards*, first, *prayer*, “We made our prayer unto our God.” The second guard is *watchfulness*, “We set a watch.” When I have spoken on these two subjects, I shall take, as my third topic, *the two guards together*. “We prayed, and we set a watch.” We must have them both if we would defeat the enemy.

I. First then, dear friends, think of THE FIRST GUARD, “We made our prayer unto our God.”

Speaking of this prayer, I would hold it up as a pattern for our prayers in a like condition. It was *a prayer that meant business*. Sometimes, when we pray, I am afraid that we are not transacting business at the throne of grace, but Nehemiah was as practical in his prayer as he was in the setting of the watch.

Some brethren get up in our prayer meetings, and say some very good things, but what they really ask for, I am sure I do not know. I have heard prayers of which I have said, when they were over, “Well, if God answers that prayer, I have not the least idea of what He will give us.” It was a very beautiful prayer, and there was a great deal of explanation of doctrine and experience in it, but I do not think that God wants to have doctrine or experience explained to Him.

The fault about the prayer was that there was not anything asked for in it. I like when brethren are praying, that they should be as business-like as a good carpenter at his work. It is of no use to have a hammer with an ivory handle, unless you aim it at the nail you mean to drive in up to the head, and if that is your object, an ordinary hammer will do as well as a fine one, perhaps better.

Now, the prayers of Nehemiah and the Jews were petitions for divine protection. They knew what they wanted, and they asked for it definitely. Oh, for more definiteness in prayer! I am afraid that our prayers are often clouds, and we get mists for answers. Nehemiah’s prayer meant business. I wish we could always pray in this way.

When I pray, I like to go to God just as I go to a banker when I have a cheque to be cashed. I walk in, put the cheque down on the counter, the clerk gives me my money, I take it up, and go about my business. I do not know that I ever stopped in a bank five minutes to talk with the clerks, when I have received my change, I go away and attend to other matters. That is how I like to pray, but there is a way of praying that seems like lounging near the mercy seat, as though one had no particular reason for being found there. Let it not be so with you, brethren. Plead the promise, believe it, receive the blessing God is ready to give, and go about your business. The prayer of Nehemiah and his companions meant business.

In the next place, it was *a prayer that overcame difficulties*. The text begins with a long word, “Nevertheless.” If we pull it to pieces, we get three words, never the less, when certain things happen, we will pray never the less, on the contrary, we will cry to our God all the more. Sanballat sneered, but we prayed never the less, but all the more because of his sneers. Tobiah uttered a cutting jest, but we prayed never the less, but all the more because of his mocking taunt. If men make a jest of your religion, pray none the less. If they even become cruel and violent to you, pray none the less, never the less, not a word less, not a syllable less, not a desire less, and not any faith less.

What are your difficulties, dear friend, in coming to the mercy seat? What hindrance lies in your way? Let nothing obstruct your approach to the throne of grace. Turn all stumbling stones into steppingstones, and come, with holy boldness, and say, notwithstanding all opposition, “Never the less, we made our prayer unto our God.” Nehemiah’s prayer meant business, and overcame difficulties.

Notice, next, that it was *a prayer that came before anything else*. It does not say that Nehemiah set a watch, and then prayed, but “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch.”

Prayer must always be the fore horse of the team. Do whatever else is wise, but not until you have prayed. Send for the physician if you are sick, but first pray. Take the medicine if you have a belief that it will do you good, but first pray. Go and talk to the man who has slandered you, if you think you ought to do so, but first pray. “Well, I am going to do so and so,” says one, “and I shall pray for a blessing on it afterwards.” Do not begin it until you have prayed. Begin, continue, and end everything with prayer, but especially begin with prayer.

Some people would never begin what they are going to do if they prayed about it first, for they could not ask God’s blessing upon it. Is there anybody here who is going out of this Tabernacle to a place where he should not go? Will he pray first? He knows that he cannot ask a blessing on it, and therefore he ought not to go there. Go nowhere where you cannot go after prayer. This would often be a good guide in your choice of where you should go. Nehemiah first prayed and then set a watch.

Once more, it was *a prayer that was continued*. If I read the passage aright, “We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night,” it means that, as long as they watched, they prayed. They did not pray their prayer and then leave off, and go away, as naughty boys do when they give runaway knocks at a door. Having begun to pray, they continued praying. So long as there were any enemies about, the prayer and the watching were never parted. They continued still to cry to Him who keeps Israel as long as they set the watchman of the night to warn them of the foe.

When shall we leave off praying, brothers and sisters? Well, they say that we shall do so when we get to heaven. I am not clear about that. I do not believe in the intercession of saints for us, but I remember that it is written in the book of Revelation, that the souls under the altar cried, “How long, O Lord?” Those souls are waiting for the resurrection, waiting for the coming of Christ, waiting for the triumph of His kingdom, and I cannot conceive of their waiting there without often crying, “O Lord, how long? Remember Your Son, glorify His name, accomplish the number of Your elect.” But certainly, as long as we are here, we must pray.

One lady, who professed that she had long been perfect, said that her mind was in such complete conformity with the mind of God, that she need not pray any longer. Poor creature! What did she know about the matter? She needed to begin at the first letter of the alphabet of salvation, and pray, “God be merciful to me, a sinner!” When people imagine they need not to pray, the Lord have mercy upon them!

*“Long as they live let Christians pray,
For only while they pray they live.”*

The prayer which Nehemiah offered was, next, *a prayer that was homemade*. There may be some of you who like prayers made for you, and it may be that, if all the congregation are to join in the supplication, and every voice is to speak, the prayer must be prepared even as a hymn is, but ready-made prayers always seem to me very much like ready-made clothes, they are meant to fit everybody, and it is very seldom that they fit anybody.

For real business at the mercy seat, give me a homemade prayer, a prayer that comes out of the deeps of my heart, not because I invented it, but because God the Holy Spirit put it there, and gave it such a living force that I could not help letting it come out. Though your words are broken, and your sentences are disconnected, if your desires are earnest, if they are like coals of juniper, burning with a vehement flame, God will not mind how they find expression. If you have no words, perhaps you will pray better without them. There are prayers that break the backs of words, they are too heavy for any human language to carry.

This prayer, then, whatever it may have been as to its words, was one the pleaders made, “We made our prayers unto our God.”

It is very important to notice, however, that it was *a prayer that went to the home of prayer*, “We made our prayer unto our God.” You have heard of the man who prayed at Boston, “the hub of the universe,” and the report in the paper the next morning was that “The Rev. Dr. So-and-so prayed the finest prayer that was ever addressed to a Boston audience.” I am afraid that there are some prayers of that sort, that are prayed to the congregation. That is not the kind of prayer that God loves. Forget that there is anybody present. Forget that a human ear is listening to your accents, and let it be said of your prayer, “Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God.”

It is a very commonplace remark to make, that prayer must go to God if it is to be of any avail, but it is very necessary to make it. When prayer does not go to God, what is the good of it? When you come out of your closet, and feel that you have only gone through a form, how much are you benefited? Make your prayers unto your God. Speak in His ear, knowing that He is there, and come away knowing that He has replied to you, that He has lifted up the light of His countenance upon you. That is the kind of prayer we need for our protection against our enemies both day and night.

Only once more upon this first point, I gather from the words before me that it was *a prayer saturated with faith*. “We made our prayer unto—God”? No, “unto our God.” They had taken JEHOVAH to be their God, and they prayed to Him as their God. They had a full assurance that, though He was the God of the whole earth, yet He was especially their God, and so they made their prayer unto the God who had given Himself to them, and to whom they belonged by covenant relationship. “We made our prayers unto *our God*.” Those two little words carry a vast weight of meaning. The door of prayer seems to turn on those two golden hinges—“our God.”

If you and I are to be delivered from the evil that is in the world, if we are to be kept building the church of God, we must have for our first guard mighty, believing prayer, such as Nehemiah and his Jewish friends presented unto the Lord.

II. I have now to speak to you about THE SECOND GUARD, “We set a watch against them day and night, because of them.”

This setting of the watch was *a work appointed*. “We set a watch.” Nehemiah did not say, “Now, some of you fellows, go and watch,” leaving the post of watchmen open to any who chose to take it, but they “set a watch.” A certain number of men had to go on duty at a certain point, at a certain hour, and to remain for a certain length of time, and be on guard against the adversary. “We set a watch.”

Brethren, if we are to watch over ourselves, and we must do so, we must do it with a definite purpose. We must not say, “I must try to be watchful.” No, no, you must be watchful, and your watchfulness must be as distinct and definite an act as your prayer. “We set a watch.”

Some of you have seen the guards changed at the barracks, there is a special time for each company to mount guard. When you go to bed at night, pray the Lord to guard you during the darkness. In the morning, set a watch when you go to your business. Set a watch when you go to the dinner table, set a watch when you return home. Oh, how soon we may be betrayed into evil unless we set a watch!

It was *a work carefully done*, for Nehemiah says, “We set a watch against them day and night, because of them.” Those three last words would be better rendered, “over against them,” that is, wherever there was an enemy, there he set a watch. They are likely to come up this way. Very well, set a watch there. Perhaps they may shift about, and come up this way. Very well, set a watch there. Possibly they may come climbing over the wall in front here. Well, set a watch there. “We set a watch over against them.”

One brother has a very hot temper. Brother, set a watch there. Another is very much inclined to levity. Brother, set a watch there. Another is very morose at home, critical, picking holes in other people’s coats. Brother, set a watch there. One friend has a tendency to pride, another to unbelief. Set a watch wherever the foe is likely to come. “We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch over against them.”

It was *a work continued*, Nehemiah says, “We set a watch against them day and night.” What! is there to be someone sitting up all night? Of course there is. If Sanballat had told them when he meant to attack them, they might have gone to sleep at other times, but as he did not give them that information, they had to set a watch “day and night.” The devil will not give you notice when he is going to tempt you, he likes to take men by surprise, therefore, set a watch day and night.

It was *a work quickened by knowledge*. They knew that Sanballat would come if he could, so they set a watch. The more you know of the plague of your own heart, the more you will set a watch against it. The more you know of the temptations that are in the world through lust, the more should you set a watch. The older you are, the more you should watch.

“Oh!” says an aged friend, “you should not say that, it is the young people who go wrong.” Is it? In the Old Testament or in the New, have you an instance of a young believer who went astray? The Bible tells us of many old men who were tripped up by Satan when they were not watching, so you have need to set a watch even when your hair turns grey, for you will not be out of gunshot of the devil until you have passed through the gate of pearl into the golden streets of the New Jerusalem.

You and I, dear friends, have need to set a watch against the enemies of our holy faith. Some people ask me, “Why do you talk so much about the ‘Down-Grade?’ Let men believe what they like. Go on with your work for God, and pray to Him to set them right.” I believe in praying and setting a watch. We have to guard with jealous care “the faith once for all delivered to the saints.” When you find, as you find now, professing Christians and professing Christian ministers denying every article of the faith, or putting another meaning upon all the words than they must have been understood to bear, and preaching lies in the name of the Most High, it is time that somebody set a watch against them.

A night-watchman’s place is not an easy berth, but I am willing to take that post for my blessed Master’s sake. Those professed servants of Christ who enter into an unholy alliance with men who deny the faith will have to answer for it at the last great day. As for us, brethren, when our Lord comes, let Him find us watching as well as praying.

But dear friends, to come home to ourselves, we must set a watch against our own personal adversaries. I hope that, in one sense, you have no personal enemies, that you owe nobody a grudge, but that you live in peace and love towards all mankind. But there are Christian people here, who will go to homes where everybody in the house is against them. Many a godly woman goes from the sanctuary to a drunken husband, many children, converted to God, see anything but what they like to see in their homes. What are they to do in such circumstances? Set a watch.

Dear woman, how do you know but that you shall be the means of saving your unconverted husband? If so, you must set a watch, do not give him a bit of your mind, you will not convert him that way. And you, dear children, who have come to Christ, and joined the church, mind that you are dutiful and obedient, for otherwise you will destroy all hope of bringing your parents to the Savior. Set a watch. “Oh!” you say, “if I do a little wrong, they magnify it.” I know they do, therefore, set a watch, be more careful. Set a watch over your temper, set a watch over your tongue, set a watch over your actions. Be patient, be gentle, be loving. May the Spirit of God work all this in you!

But there is another set of enemies, much more dreadful than these adversaries that are without us, the foes within, the evil tendencies of our corrupt nature, against which we must always set a watch. Perhaps you say, “How can I do this?” Well, first, know what they are. People who are beginning the Christian life should seek to know where their weak points are.

I should not wonder, dear friend, if your weak point lies where you think that you are strong. Where you think, “Oh, I shall never go wrong there!”—that is the very place where you are likely to fall. Set a watch wherever any weakness has appeared, and if you have, in the past in your Christian life, grieved the Holy Spirit by anything wrong, set a double watch there. Where you have tripped once, you may trip again, for you are the same man.

Set a watch also, dear friend, whenever you feel quite secure. Whenever you feel certain that you cannot be tempted in a particular direction, that proves that you are already as proud as Lucifer. Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch. Avoid every occasion of sin. If any course of conduct would lead you into sin, do not go in that direction.

I heard a man say, as an excuse for drinking, “You see, if ever I take a glass of beer, I seem to lose myself, and I must have two or three more.” Well, then, if that is the case with you, do not take a glass of beer. “But” one says, “if I get into company, I forget myself.” Then, do not go into company. Better go to heaven as a hermit, than go to hell with the multitude. Pluck out your right eye, and cut off your right hand, sooner than that these should cause you to fall into sin.

Do not go where you are likely to be tempted. “Well,” says one, “but my business calls me into the midst of temptation.” I grant you that your business may compel you to go where there are ungodly men, for how could some live at all, if they had not to come into contact with the ungodly?—they would have to go out of the world. Well, then, if that is your case, put on the whole armor of God, and do not go without being prepared to fight the good fight of faith. Set a watch, set a watch, set a watch.

Watch against the beginnings of sin. Remember, Satan never begins where he leaves off, he begins with a little sin, and he goes on to a greater one. When he first tempts men, he does not aim at all he

hopes to accomplish, but he tries to draw them aside little by little, and he works up by degrees to the greater sin he wants them to commit.

I do not believe that at the present time, a Christian man can be too precise. We serve a very precise God, “The LORD thy God is a jealous God.” Keep out of many things in which professing Christians now indulge themselves. The question is whether they are Christians at all. If we must not judge them, at any rate, let us judge ourselves, and settle it, once for all, that we dare not go where they go, indeed, we have no wish to do so.

Watch for what God has to say to you. In your reading of the Bible, if the Holy Spirit applies a text of Scripture to you with special force, regard it as a hint from your heavenly Father that there is a lesson in it for you. I am often surprised at the way in which the morning text will often instruct me through the whole day. Persons who come to hear the Word of God preached often find that, within two or three days, there is a reason why the preacher delivered that particular sermon, and a reason why they were led to hear it.

Whenever you see a professing Christian going astray from the way of holiness, do not talk about it, and so increase the mischief. “It is an ill bird that fouls its own nest.” Instead of speaking of another’s fall, set a watch for yourself and say, “That is where he slipped, that is where I may stumble if the grace of God does not keep me.” Remember our Savior’s words to the three disciples with Him in Gethsemane, “Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.”

III. I finish by putting THE TWO GUARDS TOGETHER.

“We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them.”

Dear friends, neither of these two guards is sufficient alone. *Prayer alone* will not avail. To pray and not to watch is presumption. You pretend to trust in God, and yet you are throwing yourself into danger, as the devil would have had Christ do, when he tempted Him to cast Himself down from the pinnacle of the temple. If you pray to be kept, then be watchful.

Prayer without watchfulness is hypocrisy. A man prays to be kept from sin, and then goes into temptation, his prayer is evidently a mere piece of mockery, for he does not carry it out in his practice.

Sometimes, however, ignorance may lead to prayer without watching. There are other things which ought not to be omitted. Let me tell you a simple story. There was a little schoolgirl who did not often know her lessons. And there was another girl who sat near her, who always said her lessons correctly. Her companions said to her, “Jane, how is it that you always know your lessons?” Jane replied, “I pray to God to help me, and so I know them.”

The next day, the other little girl stood up, but she did not know her lesson, and afterward she said to her friend, “I prayed to God about my lesson, but I did not know it any better than I did yesterday.” Jane said, “But did you try to learn the lesson?” “No,” she said, “I prayed about it, and I thought that was sufficient.” Of course she did not know her lesson without learning it. In the same manner, you must watch as well as pray. There must be the daily guard set upon tongue, and thought, and hand, or else prayer will be in vain.

I have known some people run great risks, and yet say that they have prayed to the Lord to preserve them. I have heard, dozens of times, these words, “I made it a matter of prayer,” and I have been ready to grow angry with the man who has uttered them. He has done a wrong thing, and he has excused himself because he says that he made it a matter of prayer.

A young man married an ungodly young woman, and yet he said that he made it a matter of prayer! A Christian woman married an ungodly man, and when someone blamed her for disobeying the Word of God, she said that she made it a matter of prayer! If you had really sought divine guidance, you would not have dared to do what the Scriptures expressly forbid a child of God. Prayer without watching is not sufficient to preserve us from evil.

On the other hand, dear friends, *watching without praying* is equally futile. To say, “I will keep myself right,” and never pray to God to keep you, is self-confidence, which must lead to evil. If you try to watch and do not pray, you will go to sleep, and there will be an end to your watching. It is only by

praying and watching that you will be able to keep on your guard. Besides, watching grows wearisome without prayer, and we soon give it up, unless we have a sweet interlude of prayer to give us rest, and to help us to continue watching.

I will not keep you longer when I have said this, *put the two together*, “Watch and pray,” or as my text has it, “Pray and watch.” One will help the other. Prayer will call out the watchman, prayer will incite him to keep his eyes open, prayer will be the food to sustain him during the night, prayer will be the fire to warn him. On the other hand, watching will help prayer, for watching proves prayer to be true. Watching excites prayer, for every enemy we see will move us to pray more earnestly.

Moreover, watching *is* prayer. If there be true watching, the watching itself is prayer. The two blend the one into the other. Beloved friends, I send you away with my text ringing in your ears, “We made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night.”

But I have not been speaking to all who are here. Some of you do not pray, some of you cannot set a watch. The message for you is, “Ye must be born again.” You cannot attempt Christian duties till first you have the Christian life, and the only way to get the Christian life is to have faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Come to the fountain which He has filled with His precious blood, wash there, and be clean, and then, quickened by His Spirit, set a watch.

I am looking to see some souls brought to Christ at this service, for although I have been preaching to God’s people, if they will watch for you, and pray for you, there will come a blessing to you through their watching and praying. The Lord grant that it may come to many of you! “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.” May many seek and find the Lord tonight, and may many call upon Him in truth! “Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord, shall be saved.” God grant that it may be so to everybody here, for Jesus’ sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—NEHEMIAH 4

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK” 994, 999, 668

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

NEHEMIAH 4:1-23

Verse 1. *But it came to pass, that when Sanballat heard that we builded the wall, he was wroth, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.*

It was needful to rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, which had been lying in ruins. They went on pretty briskly, for everyone had a mind to work. There never was a good work yet but what there were some to oppose it, and there never will be till the Lord comes. Sanballat heard what the Jews were doing, and he was very angry. “He was wroth, and took great indignation.” He was all on fire with anger that God’s work was being continued.

2. *And he spake before his brethren and the army of Samaria, and said, What do these feeble Jews?*

The enemies of God’s people generally take to sneering. It is a very easy way of showing opposition.

2. *Will they fortify themselves? will they sacrifice? will they make an end in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of the rubbish which are burned?*

No doubt these questions were thought to be very witty and very sarcastic. The enemies of Christ are generally good hands at this kind of thing. Well, if it amuses them, I do not know that it need hurt us much, for after all, it is their way of paying homage to God’s power.

3. *Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him,—*

Such a man as Sanballat never lacks friends. If there is a bad man anywhere, there is sure to be another close at hand. The devil does not make a fire with one stick. When he has set the first one alight,

he can generally find a kindling to put near it. Tobiah the Ammonite, who was tarred with the same brush as Sanballat the Horonite, was by him.

3. *And he said, Even that which they build, if a fox go up, he shall even break down their stone wall.*

Tobiah, you see, was another great wit. If possible, he excelled his leader in sarcasm. Are any of you the objects of ridicule for Christ's sake? Bear it without being much distressed by it. It will break no bones, after all. If your Lord endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, you may very well bear it without being distressed.

4-5. *Hear, O our God; for we are despised: and turn their reproach upon their own head, and give them for a prey in the land of captivity; and cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out from before thee: for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.*

This was righteous indignation, but Nehemiah is not a perfect model for us. He was not only stern, but he mingled with his severity a measure of bitterness in his prayer that we must not imitate. Sometimes, when we have seen men plotting against God, seeking to ruin the souls of others, and trying to stop us in our endeavor to build up the church of God, we have felt such language as this trembling on our lips. It were better, however, for us to bow the knee in humble imitation of our Lord upon the cross, and cry, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

6. *So built we the wall;*

You half expected to read, "So we stopped building the wall, and answered Sanballat and Tobiah." Not a bit of it. They kept to their work, and let these two men scoff as they pleased.

6. *And all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work.*

They built the wall as high as they meant it to be ultimately, but they carried it all round, and joined it well together. If we cannot do all we would like to do, let us do what we can, and let us endeavor, as far as possible, to finish off the part that we do, waiting for better times to carry the walls higher.

7. *But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth,—*

They were "wroth" before, now they were "very wroth." If a work has no opposition from Satan, we may be half afraid it is good for nothing. If you cannot make the devil roar, you have not done him much harm, but the more he roars, the more cause there is for the angels singing the praises of God before the throne of God.

8. *And conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it.*

It is wonderful how unanimous bad men can be. It has always struck me as a very startling thing, that you have never heard of any division among the devils in hell. There are no sects among the devils, they seem to work together with an awful unanimity of purpose in their wicked design. In this one thing they seem to excel the family of God. Oh, that we were as hearty and united in the service of God as wicked men are in the service of Satan!

9-10. *Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. And Judah said,—*

Judah, you know, was the lion tribe. Christ is "the Lion of the tribe of Judah." But Judah, instead of being lion-hearted, made a noise more like a mouse than a lion, and Judah said,—

10. *The strength of the bearers of burden is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.*

Poor Judah! He ought to have been bolder and braver, but he was not. It is the same today, some, who seemed to be pillars, prove very weak in the hour of trial, and by their cowardice discourage the rest.

11. *And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come in the midst among them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease.*

While some were discouraging the people within the city, their enemies, without the walls, were plotting to take them by surprise, and slay them.

12. *And it came to pass, that when the Jews which dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times, From all places whence ye shall return unto us they will be upon you.*

These Jews ought to have been helping to build the wall, but they did not come to the help of the Lord's people. Still, they were sufficiently friendly to tell Nehemiah of the plot that was being hatched by his enemies. God knows how, when His enemies are sinking a mine, to undermine them. If secrecy is necessary to the success of evil, somebody speaks out, and tells the story, so that the plot is discovered.

13. *Therefore set I in the lower places behind the wall, and on the higher places, I even set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.*

When Nehemiah knew the danger to which the people were exposed, he took measures to guard against it. I like the common sense of Nehemiah. He kept families together. "I set the people after their families, with their swords, their spears, and their bows." Beloved friends, I have no greater joy than such as I had last Tuesday, when I received five children of one family, all brought to Christ. May the Lord make our families to be the guards of the church!

14. *And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them:*

Fear may waken us, but it must never be allowed to weaken us. We should put on the armor, and take the sword and spear and bow when there is cause for fear, we should never dream of running away.

14-15. *Remember the Lord, which is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses. And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us, and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work.*

There was no fighting after all. As soon as the enemy knew that their plot was found out, they did not make any assault. One commentator says—"Some men, if they had been delivered from danger, would have returned every one to the ale-house, but these men returned every one to his work." They went back to their building, and continued still in the service of the city.

16-17. *And it came to pass from that time forth, that the half of my servants wrought in the work, and the other half of them held both the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the habergeons; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah. They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.*

The sword and the trowel both guarded the city and built the wall.

18. *For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.*

What the trumpet was for, we are told directly.

19-20. *And I said unto the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated upon the wall, one far from another. In what place therefore ye hear the sound of the trumpet, resort ye thither unto us: our God shall fight for us.*

That is a grand sentence. The moment you hear the trumpet, you are to leave your place on the wall, and come to the point where the enemy is attacking us. But Nehemiah does not say, "You shall fight for us," he puts it much better, "Our God shall fight for us." So He will still.

21. *So we labored in the work: and half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning till the stars appeared.*

They made long days. Christian people do not want merely eight hours a day for Christ. We can sometimes do eighteen hours' work for Him in a day, and we wish that we could do twenty-four.

22-23. *Likewise at the same time said I unto the people, Let every one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and labor on the day. So neither I, nor my brethren, nor my servants, nor the men of the guard which followed me, none of us put off our clothes,—*

Nehemiah was a good leader. He did not say, “Go,” he said, “Come,” and he bore the brunt of the service. Like Alexander, who went with the Macedonians into the rough places, and did the hard work, so did Nehemiah. He and those with him did not put off their clothes even for sleeping.

23. *Saving that every one put them off for washing.*

Which was necessary, for cleanliness is next to godliness. May the Lord send us more Nehemiahs, and plenty of people to work with them, who can endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ, and who will also be good builders of the church of God!

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